

Yellowstone

Lake Trout Crisis

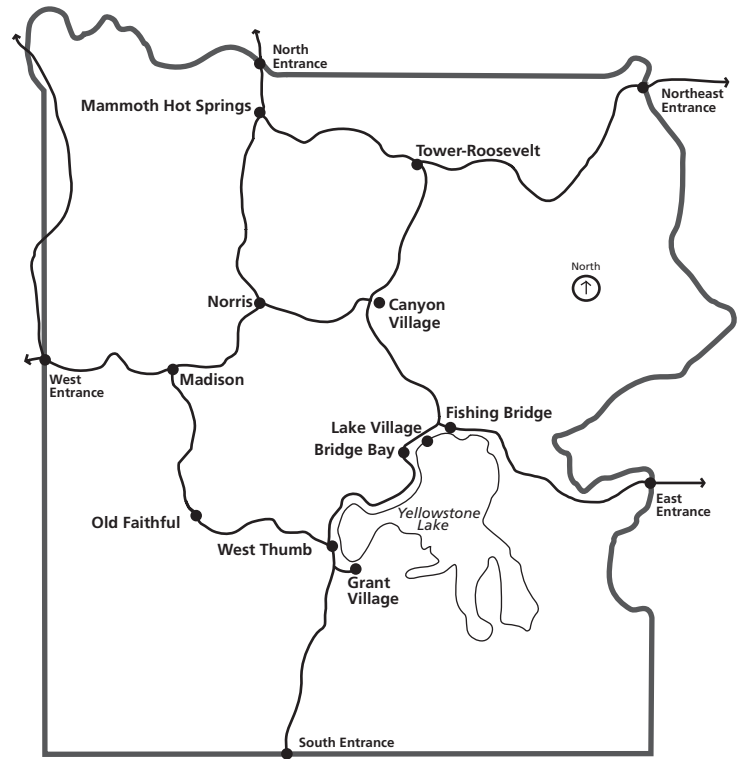


Yellowstone National Park
P.O. Box 168
Yellowstone, WY 82190



The Problem

Lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*) were confirmed in Yellowstone Lake in 1994. They pose a grave threat to the future of the lake's native Yellowstone cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki bouvieri*) and to many fish-eating animals such as pelicans, eagles, ospreys, otters, and bears. In the early years of the park, lake trout were stocked in some park waters—but never into Yellowstone Lake. No one knows how lake trout were introduced into Yellowstone Lake, but probably it occurred several decades ago.



How Can Lake Trout Pose Such A Threat?

Yellowstone Lake contains the largest inland cutthroat trout population in the world and provided an almost museum-pure home for them for thousands of years. Now the native cutthroat trout are now severely threatened by lake trout. The problems are caused by the differences between the two kinds of fish:

- Lake trout are voracious predators and will eat the smaller Yellowstone cutthroat trout.
- Adult cutthroat trout live in relatively shallow water where they feed on a variety of insects and plankton.
- Adult cutthroat trout also spawn in dozens of small streams around Yellowstone Lake.

- Because of their use of shallow waters, cutthroat trout are available to fish-eating predators such as bald eagles, osprey, pelicans, cormorants, gulls, otters, and grizzly bears.
- Lake trout spend significant time in deep water, and they spawn in the waters of the lake itself.
- Because of their use of deep waters, lake trout are well out of reach of most predators.

If lake trout become the dominant fish in Yellowstone Lake, the ripple effects throughout the ecosystem could be disastrous, with far-reaching consequences for predators, anglers, and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

What The Park Is Doing

Currently, there is no way to eliminate lake trout from Yellowstone Lake. However, ongoing management of the problem may be able to control the growth of the lake trout population, maintain the cutthroat trout population, and sustain the wildlife populations that depend on the cutthroat trout for food.

The National Park Service has instituted an intensive gill-netting program that targets lake trout. Gill-netting begins as soon as ice is gone from the lake and continues into October. Since the mid-1990s, almost 450,000 lake trout have been caught. Gill netting also provides valuable data—population size, age structure, maturity, distribution, and potential new spawning areas—that lead to more effective control of this species.

In August 2008, a scientific review panel overwhelmingly agreed that the Yellowstone Lake cutthroat trout population is in serious trouble, but that suppression efforts could restore this population to healthy levels. They believe very little time remains to turn the situation around, and recommended park managers significantly increase lake trout removal immediately. Toward this goal, the park contracted with a private fishing company to increase the take of lake trout. During a three-week period in 2009, NPS and the private company worked cooperatively to remove over 14,000 additional lake trout from Yellowstone Lake. In 2010, the park expects to expand contract netting to ten weeks and to test deep-water trap nets that have been successful in other large lakes.

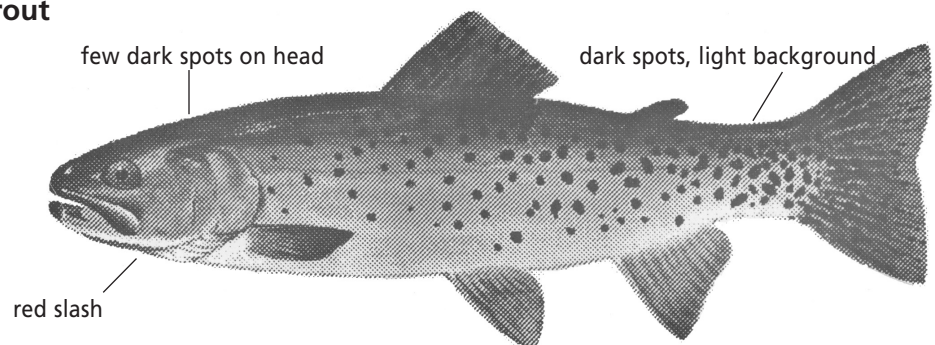
Your Help Is Vital

Anglers are an important component in the lake trout management program. They have had the most success in catching lake trout that are between 15 and 24 inches long. These fish are found in shallow, near-shore waters in June and early July. Annually, anglers take approximately 9,000 lake trout from Yellowstone Lake.

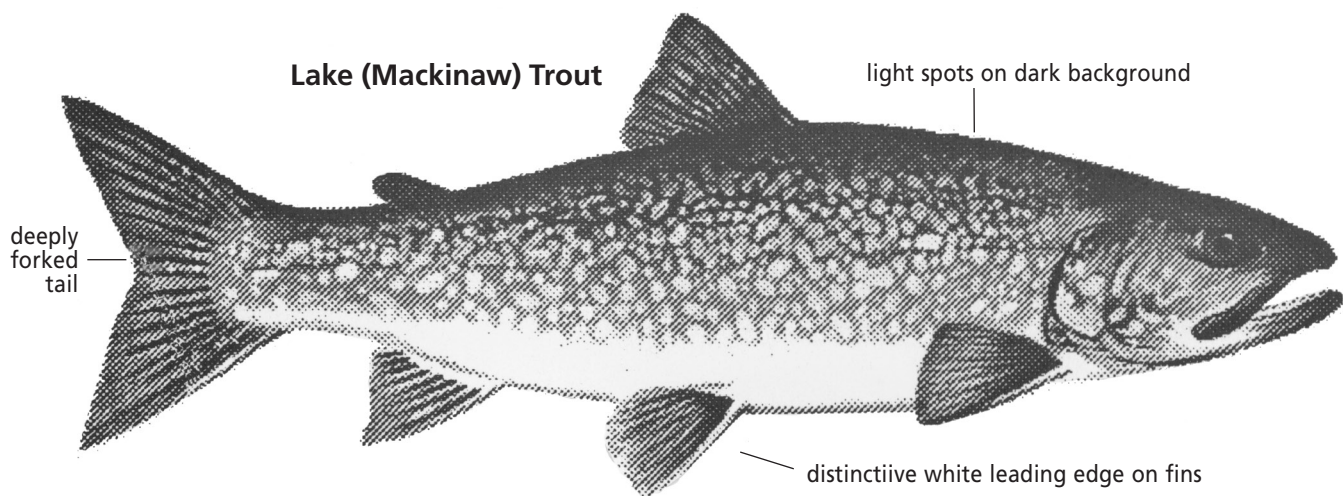
Fishing regulations require anglers to kill all lake trout caught in Yellowstone Lake and its tributaries. In addition, all cutthroat trout fishing is catch-and-release only.

How To Identify What You Catch

Cutthroat Trout



Lake (Mackinaw) Trout



For More Information

www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/fishing.htm
www.greateryellowstonescience.org

You'll find several documents on this website about aquatic invasive species, lake trout, and also Yellowstone National Park's fishing regulations.